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ABSTRACT

Three studies determined if the Summer Step reading program (a residential camping program implemented on the campus of Camp Baskervill Episcopal Outreach of Pawleys Island, South Carolina, using a personalized, contextualized reading approach) was effective, if children's self-esteem was enhanced by participation in the program, and if the students' attitudes toward reading improved. Sixty-seven boys and 52 girls participated in the reading study; 70 boys and 61 girls participated in the self-esteem study; and 69 boys and 55 girls participated in the attitude study. Approximately 90% of the children were considered high risk students for academic school failure. The residential camping program for adolescent age, predominantly African-American girls and boys lasted 3 weeks for girls and 4 weeks for boys. The emphasis for the reading program was keeping language whole and integrating all of the language processes through the use of the language and experience of the students. Subjects completed pre- and post-tests. A self-concept scale was administered to subjects in the self-esteem study. A Likert test to determine reading attitude was written by the researchers and administered as pre- and post-tests. Results indicated that: (1) students learned the comprehension skills of main idea, contextual vocabulary, detail, and sequencing; (2) students' self-esteem improved; and (3) students' attitudes toward reading improved significantly. (Three figures of data are attached.) (RS)

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Jessie Brown

A PERSONALIZED READING APPROACH FOR AT RISK MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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A PERSONALIZED READING APPROACH FOR AT RISK MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

The Summer Step reading program was implemented during the Summer of 1990 on the campus of Camp Baskervill Episcopal Outreach of Pawleys Island, Inc., in Pawleys Island, South Carolina. Summer Step was a residential camping program for adolescent age, predominantly high-risk African-American girls and boys who participated in academic and recreational activities in separate camping experiences while in residence. The duration of the girls' camping experience was three weeks and the boys were there four weeks.

The purposes of the study were:

1. To determine the effectiveness of a personalized, contextualized reading approach as a means of teaching selected comprehension reading skills to predominantly high-risk adolescent age children.
2. To determine if the level of self-esteem of the children could be enhanced by their involvement in the program.
3. To determine if the students' attitude toward reading increased positively as a result of their participation in the program.

There were 67 boys and 52 girls, totaling 119 subjects in the reading study. In the self-esteem study, there were 131 subjects, of which 70 were boys and 61 were girls. Completing the Likert pre-and post-tests were 124 students, 55 girls and 69 boys. Approximately 90% of the children were considered high risk students for academic school failure, as noted by the Summer Step Administrator. Student eligibility for the program was determined by referral from school guidance counselors, social service agencies, such as the

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Department of Social Service in the State of South Carolina and other social service agencies such as the Big Brother, Big Sister program.

Personnel directly responsible for program implementation were 12 full-time teacher/camp counselors (six male and six female), three part-time teachers, one teacher supervisor, 1 program director, two chaplains who served as counselors and other support personnel who were regular employees/administrators of Camp Baskervill, Episcopal Outreach of Pawleys Island, Inc. The teacher/camp counselors were mainly undergraduate students majoring in an assortment of subject matter disciplines. Of the twelve teacher/camp counselors, one held an early childhood degree from Ireland and two were elementary education majors. These persons planned with the part-time teachers, taught lessons and conducted self-esteem building activities with the campers.

The three part-time teachers were primarily responsible for planning, securing materials, instruction and weekly assessments. One of the part-time teachers was certified and had taught biology, one had a psychology degree from a four year institution and the third person was an undergraduate student.

The teacher supervisor coordinated testing and record keeping, supervised teachers and teacher/camp counselors, procured and made materials and the individual served as a resource for teaching methods and student management. This person was a certified teacher and had taught one year in the

public schools.

The Chaplains were persons whose role it was to listen to students and work with them in solving their personal or behavior problems. They also formed a support network for the Summer Step staff. The Chaplains were ordained ministers who were doing outreach work.

The director's responsibilities were to coordinate and administer specific operations of Summer Step--day and evening activities, including student discipline when students were referred by camp staff members. The Director had a mathematics degree from a four year institution.

The girls attended camp the first three weeks of the program and the boys were there last, for four weeks. The teacher/camp counselors were responsible for the students 24 hours per day, with the academic component in a Monday through Friday format, beginning and ending at 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., respectively. The part-time teachers were present during the morning hours and the Teacher Supervisor worked 8 hours each school day. The Director and Chaplains were available 24 hours per day.

All staff participated in a week's training program just prior to the start up of the girls' camp. The purpose of the training was to orient the staff to the camp procedures, to model the academic concepts and self-esteem building strategies and to allow them to practice the specific teaching strategies that were germane to the implementation

of the selected reading comprehension skills and the self-esteem building components of the program.

READING STUDY SUMMARY

Keeping language whole was the emphasis of the Summer Step reading program. The programmatic thrust was to integrate all of the language processes through the use of the language and experiences of the students. Reading, writing, listening and speaking were interwoven into the fabric of the program.

The following reading strategies were implemented in the program:

1. The Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DRTA) approach in conjunction with the Ebony magazine was the primary instructional strategy utilized to develop the specific reading comprehension concepts of main idea, story detail, contextual vocabulary and sequencing.

2. Each day, students had the opportunity to read. The reading material that students self-selected consisted of their own writing, the writing of their peers, group writings and high interest books and other commercially prepared reading material.

3. The teachers read to their students every day. Students were required to listen attentively and were exposed to different forms, styles and purposes of writing by various authors. Some of the material read was suggested by students and other materials were selected by the teachers.

4. Writing was used as a reading strategy on a daily basis. Each day, students wrote in their journals which were personal communications between each student and the individual's teacher. No corrections were made in the journals; however, teachers did respond as needed.

   Process writing, inclusive of pre-writing, the rough drafting phase, editing, revision and publishing was fundamental to the reading program. It was during

the editing and revision stages that such conventions as correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization and a myriad of other skills such as dictionary skills, characterization and plot were introduced and emphasized.

5. Students had the opportunity to express their ideas orally through the use of cooperative learning strategies and discussions with the teachers. Students also talked about their personal experiences and reactions to various program activities and they interacted with peers and the teacher on a daily basis.

6. Music being a part of the students' culture was used as a teaching strategy. The music utilized in the reading program conveyed a positive message and served as a medium for teaching the selected reading comprehension skills.

Findings

The specific comprehension skills under investigation were main idea, contextual vocabulary, story detail and sequencing.

The Brigance Diagnostic Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills, Reading Comprehension Placement Test, Form A and B were administered in a pre-and post-test setting to reject the null hypothesis that there would be no difference between the scores of the students participating in the program as measured by the pre-and post-tests.

Form A of the test was given to all students in small groups on the second day of the camp by Camp Baskervill personnel. Form B of the test was administered on the day prior to departure.

The t-test for dependent samples was applied with the following results: T value = 4.91 with a one-tailed

significance of $p < .0001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. (See Appendix A, Figure 1.)

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that students could learn the selected comprehension skills of main idea, contextual vocabulary, detail and sequencing through this approach. Questions that can be raised include: What is the student retention rate of this learning? When these students are in the public schools, will there be any transfer of learning?

Another question, and perhaps one of more importance; what is the implication of utilizing this contextualized, personalized teaching approach with adolescent age children who need another chance at learning to read and write more proficiently in the public schools. Given the specific comprehension skills under investigation and any test limitations, the results indicate this approach was effective.

SELF-ESTEEM STUDY SUMMARY

One basic need that must be addressed before optimal academic learning can occur is self-esteem. Traditionally, teachers in middle and secondary schools have been trained to teach their discipline; but they are not trained adequately to foster effectively, the socio-emotional development of the individual. Yet, unless these needs are met, the rate of

school success is lessened. Self-esteem has been related positively to academic school success. In Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs", survival, safety, belonging and self-esteem are basic needs. This means that intellectual or academic needs cannot be adequately addressed, if the students' need of self-esteem is not fulfilled. The two are inextricable.

In the Summer Step program, teachers were required to foster the development of positive self-esteem in each student. The basic tenets of the strategies utilized were:

1. Students were encouraged to give and receive compliments graciously. The basic theme, "I am someone special, and so are you" permeated the academic program and it was also reflected in the activities that were held throughout the day.

2. A "human development" activity designed to encourage students to become better acquainted, clarify values, listen to one another and share positive feelings, and sometimes negative feelings was conducted at least once each day. Additionally, students practiced group dynamics skills, such as brainstorming and consensus forming as tools for solving their problems.

3. Chaplains were on hand to offer support and personal guidance as needed.

Findings

The specific objective of the study was to determine if positive self-esteem was fostered by student involvement in the program. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was administered to test the null hypothesis that there would be no difference between the pre-and post-test scores of the students participating in the program. The test was administered to all students in small groups on the second

day of the camp and the same test was administered on the next to the last day of the camp.

The t-test for dependent samples was applied to the data with the following results: T-Value = 5.06 with a one-tailed significance of $p < .0001$. (See Appendix A, Figure 2.)

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that students' positive self-esteem did improve when they participated in the program. Questions which may be raised include: Will this improvement continue on into the academic school year. Will students continue to feel good about themselves?

Perhaps of greater importance, is this approach a viable one, worthy of consideration for use with adolescent age students in their public school setting? Given the any possible limitations of the test, the results indicate the affirmative.

ATTITUDINAL STUDY SUMMARY

The psycho-linguistics of reading is important. The emotions that are evoked on the part of the student when a reading requirement is made by the teacher can play a role in how well the student accomplishes the reading task and can affect how that student feels about reading. Students had the opportunity to read self-selected high interest reading materials, their own individual and group writings, and the "textbook" they used for reading instruction was the Ebony

Magazine, which is very commonly found in the homes of African American people.

Findings

The specific objective was to determine if the students' participation in the Summer Step program influenced their attitude towards reading. A Likert test was written by the researcher and administered in a pre-and post-test setting to test the null hypothesis that there would be no difference between the pre-and post-test scores of the individuals in the study after program participation. The test was administered in small groups to the children. The t-test for dependent samples was applied to the pre-and post-test data resulting in a T-Value of 3.42 and a one-tailed significance of $p < .001$. (See Appendix A, Figure 3.)

Discussion

The results of the study revealed that the attitude of students regarding reading improved significantly from the time of the pre-test to the post-test. The question again is, will this feeling continue and would this reading approach have merit when used in the public schools as a means of increasing students attitudes towards reading.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed to determine whether a personalized, contextualized approach to teaching the selected reading comprehension skills is effective. The specific comprehension skills under investigation; main idea, story detail, contextualized vocabulary and sequencing were taught through utilizing the instructional strategies inherent in the Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DRTA) method in conjunction with the Ebony magazine, Cooperative Learning and Oral Expression, Process Writing and Journal writing, Reading through Music, Oral Expression, Self-Selected Reading and Teacher Reading to Students.

The study was also designed to determine if the level of self-esteem and attitude towards reading increased as an outcome of the students' participation in the program. In all three instances, the results revealed that the objectives were achieved at a statistically significant level of confidence.

It is recommended that further study be done to determine the feasibility of implementing this reading approach in public schools during the regular school year with certificated, experienced classroom teachers.

APPENDIX A

READING TEST RESULTS

ITEM	SCORE 1	SCORE 2
N	119	119
MEAN	23.53	27.17
STD DEV.	6.91	8.12
DIFFERENCE IN MEANS	3.64	
T-VALUE	4.91	
SIGNIFICANCE ONE-TAILED	0.0001	

FIGURE 1

SELF-ESTEEM TEST RESULTS

ITEM	SCORE 1	SCORE 2
N	131	131
MEAN	57.54	62.93
STD DEV.	12.88	11.50
DIFFERENCE MEANS	5.39	
T-VALUE	5.06	
SIGNIFICANCE ONE-TAILED	0.0001	

FIGURE 2

ATTITUDE TEST RESULTS

ITEM	SCORE 1	SCORE 2
N	124	124
MEAN	9.78	11.60
STD DEV.	5.43	6.13
DIFFERENCE IN MEANS	1.82	
T-VALUE	3.42	
SIGNIFICANCE ONE-TAILED	0.0006	
	(.001)	

FIGURE 3